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A Series of Illustrated Monographs

Issued Monthly

CHARDIN

PART 65——VOLUME 6

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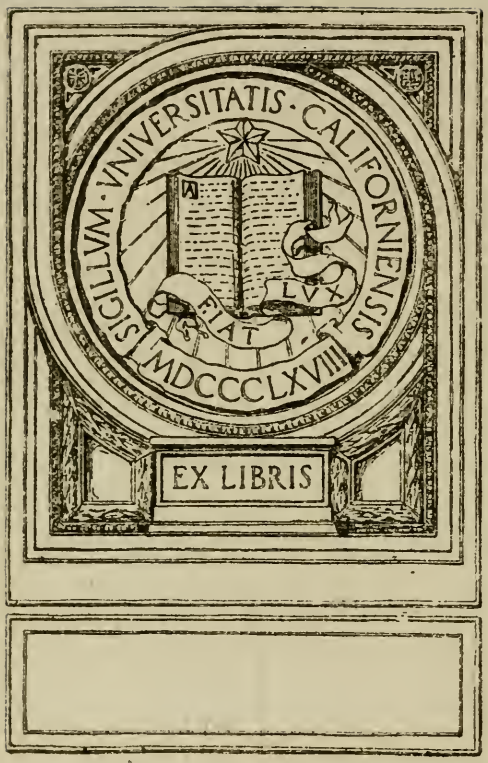
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A Series of Illustrated Monographs

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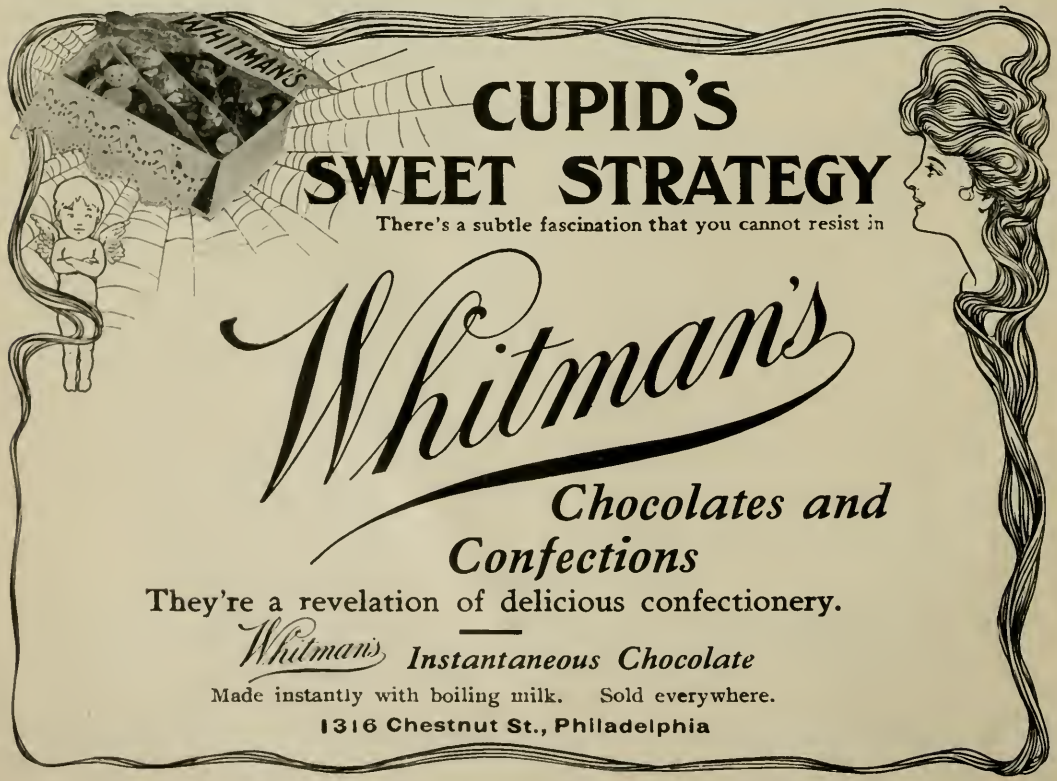

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PORTRAIT OF CHARDIN BY HIMSELF — LOUVRE, PARIS

Chardin was seventy-five years old when he drew in pastel the famous portrait here reproduced. Firm and unhesitating in touch, masterly throughout in handling, the work bears no sign of failing powers. With characteristic love of truth the artist has made no attempt to beautify features or soften lines intensified by years, but with his homely nightcap, big spectacles, and green shade protecting his tired eyes, shows himself to us as he was in every-day life in his old age.

Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin

BORN 1699: DIED 1779
FRENCH SCHOOL

JEAN-BAPTISTE-SIMÉON CHARDIN was born in Paris, in the rue de Seine, on November 2, 1699. He was of humble but respectable parentage, belonging to the unpretending lower middle class, the *petite bourgeoisie* of France. His father was a cabinet-maker and enjoyed the distinction of supplying billiard-tables to the king, but was so encumbered by the expenses of a large family, that however assiduously he applied himself to his trade the profits accruing therefrom were small in comparison with his needs. His chief thought for his children was therefore that they should early in life become self-supporting, and with this end in view, Jean-Baptiste-Siméon received but little education, and was expected, as soon as was possible, to adopt his father's profession. But the boy's talent for painting so plainly declared itself that his father, reluctantly yielding to his wish that he should be allowed to study art, sent him to the studio of Cazes, a painter of history then much in vogue.

There Chardin worked diligently, copying, in obedience to directions, pictures painted by his master, who never provided his pupils with models, holding that any artist of ability should be able to evolve such from his head. This instruction was not calculated to further Chardin's talents, and he learned but little. One day, however, it happened that Noël Nicolas Coypel—the least famous of the family of painters of that name—employed the young student to help him with the accessories of a portrait of a gentleman in hunting-costume. Chardin was given a gun to paint, and was greatly astonished, so the story goes, at Coypel's pains in the placing and lighting of the object. To one who had been taught that everything should be copied from the flat, or drawn from the imagination, this painting from the actual object was a novel experience, and for the first time Chardin was enabled to feel all the charm and interest, as well as to realize the difficulties, of rendering reality.

We next hear of Chardin as engaged in assisting the painter Van Loo, for the sum of one hundred sous a day, in the decorations of a gallery of the Palace of Fontainebleau; but the work which first brought him before the public and won for him a certain fame was a sign-board painted for the shop of a barber-surgeon, a friend of his father's, who wished to have portrayed thereon the

various implements of his calling—cups, leeches, lancets, etc. Chardin, however, had no intention of carrying out any such commonplace ideas, and at once set to work to paint, on a board fourteen feet wide by two feet high, a scene from real life, full of movement and dramatic incident, in which he depicted a man wounded in a duel or street brawl being ministered to by the barber-surgeon to whose door he had been carried, and a crowd gathered about, looking on with every evidence of the excitement which such an occurrence would naturally cause.

Almost as interested as the crowd portrayed in this scene was that which collected in front of the barber's shop when, early one Sunday morning, before the owner was up, Chardin's sign-board appeared above the doorway. The barber himself, taken completely by surprise, was at first inclined to be angry, but the enthusiasm of the public disarmed him, and when the success of the sign-board brought him increased custom, forgiveness could not be withheld.

Nothing is known of Chardin's life during the next few years, which were presumably devoted to hard and patient study. At his father's wish he became a member of the Academy of St. Luke, a confraternity of artisans as well as artists, but not until 1728 do we hear of his exhibiting any of his works. In that year he sent to one of the open-air exhibitions held in Paris in those days, in the Place Dauphine, ten or twelve pictures. Among them was one in which a cat is represented invading a larder, where, among dishes and provisions, a fish, suspended on the wall, occupies the central position. This work, sometimes called 'La Raie' ('The Ray-fish'), and now in the Louvre, won admiration from a number of academicians whom curiosity had attracted to the exhibition, and Chardin was persuaded by them to present himself for election to the Royal Academy.

In acceding to their wish, and in order that he might ascertain the true opinion of the judges as to his work, he had recourse to a little strategy. He placed the pictures which he had taken with him to the Academy for inspection—all subjects of inanimate nature—in a small anteroom, while he himself waited in an adjoining apartment. Monsieur de Largillière, one of the most competent judges and skilful colorists of the day, was the first of the academicians to arrive. Struck by the beauty of Chardin's works, he paused to examine them, and then, entering the room where the candidate was waiting, said, "You have some very beautiful pictures there, undoubtedly the work of some good Flemish painter; the Flemish school is admirable for its color. And now let us see your own works."

"Monsieur," replied Chardin, "you have just seen them."

"What!" exclaimed the astonished Largillière. "Do you mean to say that those pictures—"

"Yes, Monsieur," modestly answered the young man.

"Oh," cried Largillière, "you must certainly present yourself for election, my friend."

Largillière's opinion was shared by his fellow-academicians, and Chardin was at once by unanimous and enthusiastic vote elected to full membership

in the Royal Academy, his presentation pictures being two paintings of still-life, one of them the famous 'Raie.'

This was in September, 1728. Three years later, when he was thirty-two, Chardin's marriage with Marguerite Sainctar took place. His wife had been selected for him by his father, who, however, when pecuniary losses befell the young girl, no longer found the match desirable, and urged his son to break the engagement. But Chardin, feeling himself bound by honor, would listen to no such advice. His brief married life was full of hardship. Although his pictures were admired and appreciated by the amateurs of the day, the prices they brought were small, and it was difficult to meet the daily expenses, sadly increased by the ill-health of his wife, who at the end of four years died of consumption. The younger of the two children who had been born to them, a little girl two years old, died on the same day, and Chardin was left with the elder child, a boy of three.

He was now living in the rue Princesse. His commissions were numerous enough to keep him well employed, but he worked slowly, and asked such modest remuneration for his labor that he never, even when at the height of his fame, acquired enough money for his support. Pictures upon which infinite pains had been spent were disposed of for the most trifling sums. His friends, well aware of his childlike ignorance of business, seem to have had no scruples in taking advantage of it. A story is told of the engraver Le Bas, who visited Chardin in his studio one day and found the painter just finishing a study of still-life which so pleased the fancy of the visitor that, wishing to own it, he inquired the price. "That can easily be arranged," said Chardin. "You have on a vest which strikes my fancy; suppose we make an exchange!" To such a proposition Le Bas made all haste to accede, and immediately taking off his vest departed with his precious picture. Such transactions could assuredly never make Chardin's fortune.

It has been said that until he was nearly forty Chardin painted only inanimate objects—fruits, kitchen utensils, dead animals, etc.—and that he was first led to attempt figures by the remark of his friend Aved, the portrait-painter, who when Chardin reproached him for refusing to paint a portrait of a lady for the sum of four hundred livres—a sum which in Chardin's eyes seemed too munificent to be lightly refused—replied, "You seem to think that a portrait is as easy to paint as a sausage." Stung by his friend's remark, Chardin, according to one version of the story, at once set to work to prove that his talents were not confined to the portrayal of still-life, and painted his famous picture 'A Girl drawing Water' ('La Fontaine'), while according to another version, his 'Boy blowing Soap-bubbles' was his first essay in the new style.

That Chardin should have thus suddenly blossomed into the painter of those incomparable little domestic scenes with which his name is now indissolubly connected is hardly credible, and it is more than probable that gradual stages of development led up to the attainment of that style in which he was so skilful, so consummate a master. Indeed, that he had painted figure-pieces prior to 1737, the apocryphal date fixed upon by this story for his début in

the new field, is proved not only by his early painting of the sign-board and by the dates on several of his works, but by the recorded fact that in 1734 he exhibited at an exhibition in the Place Dauphine several figure-subjects, among them the large canvas of 'A Lady sealing a Letter' (plate x).

No sooner did Chardin's domestic scenes appear than they were multiplied and reproduced by the engravers of the day, and the low prices at which the prints were sold—two or three francs apiece—made them immensely popular in that very class of people whose lives they so truly reflected.

The first Salon which contained any of his works was that of 1737, and from that time on until 1779, the year of his death, he rarely failed to be represented in the exhibitions. From his contemporaries his works drew forth admiration and praise—notably from his friend the writer and art critic Diderot, whose 'Salons' are filled with eulogies of his inimitable workmanship. No painter of his day could render nature with so true a touch; none could produce so subtle a harmony of tones, nor so magical a color. As to his subjects, those familiar scenes of bourgeois life, of young women engaged in household work, or instructing their children in domestic tasks or religious duties, or, again, of the children themselves intent on their innocent occupations, and all charming in their naïve simplicity, they delighted the public with their novelty and the tender sentiment they expressed, and again and again the painter was called on to repeat his themes.

Intense curiosity was felt concerning Chardin's method of painting, and all sorts of stories were repeated. It was said that he used his thumb quite as much as his brush, and that instead of mixing his colors he placed them alongside of one another, "like mosaic." That his pictures "cost him great labor" he himself frankly admitted, and perhaps it was for this reason more than from any desire to make a mystery of his technique that he was unwilling that any one should see him at work.

No one was a better art critic than Chardin. A skilled technician, his judgment was sound, his feeling true. Modest in his estimate of his own powers, and always charitable in his opinion of the work of others, he was too honest to bear with any pretense. Of a painter who one day boasted of a system by which he claimed to have perfected his colors, he gravely asked, "Who told you that an artist painted with colors?"

"With what, then, Monsieur?" returned the other, in surprise.

"He makes use of colors," replied Chardin, "but he paints with feeling."

In 1744, Chardin, who had been a widower for several years, and was then forty-five, married a widow some eight years younger than himself, Françoise Marguerite Pouget by name. No happier arrangement could have been made. Fortunately, the second Madame Chardin was possessed of means sufficient to enable her husband and herself to live in comfort, and Chardin's days of struggle were ended.

His simple and upright character won for him universal respect, and the year following his marriage he was appointed treasurer of the Academy, an office which he filled honorably for many years. In 1759 another position to which his knowledge of painting rendered him admirably adapted was assigned

him, that of superintending the hanging of the pictures exhibited in the Salons —a delicate task beset with difficulties, but one in the exercise of which it is recorded that he made no enemies.

Two years before this he had been gratified by being granted an apartment in the Louvre, which he occupied for the remainder of his life. He was also in receipt of a pension from the king in remuneration of his services. But in spite of honors, and notwithstanding the happiness which his second marriage brought him, Chardin's last years were saddened. The death of his only son, a painter who had given signs of promise, but whose career was a disappointment to his father, was a grief from which he never recovered. Moreover, sensitive to adverse criticism to a degree that his outwardly calm and serene appearance would lead none but his closest friends to suspect, he keenly felt the neglect of the public, which had ceased to care for his art, and was deeply wounded by the ill-natured remarks of certain critics who insinuated that easy circumstances had made him lazy, and that his pictures, mere repetitions of subjects already painted, showed a diminution of powers. But Chardin had not yet said his last word, and as if in refutation of such criticism, and to prove that his hand had not lost its cunning, he produced in his old age, and in spite of failing eyesight, those wonderful pastel-portraits of himself and his wife, now in the Louvre, which rank among his greatest works.

His last famous picture, a portrait of a young man, executed also in the medium of pastel, was exhibited in the Salon of 1779, and attracted the attention of Madame Victoire of France, aunt of the king, Louis XVI. Wishing to purchase it, she sent to inquire of the artist the price. Chardin declared that the honor thus shown him was more than sufficient payment, and insisted upon presenting her with the picture. Great was the old painter's gratification, however, when the princess sent him a gold snuff-box in recognition of his talent.

The end was now drawing near. For some time Chardin had suffered from a number of infirmities, to which, towards the last, dropsy was added. All his afflictions were borne bravely and uncomplainingly, and on the sixth of December, 1779, watched over and tenderly cared for by his devoted wife, he passed quietly away, at the age of eighty years.

The Art of Chardin

SIDNEY COLVIN 'PORTFOLIO' 1872

IN Chardin we have one of the gifted Frenchmen of that age whom the next disowned, and whose fame has now emerged in ten times its old light. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century his work lay tossed among the least regarded lumber of the brokers' shops on the quays of the Seine, and might be bought literally for nothing by any one desiring and not ashamed to possess it. In 1810 two brilliant things of the master, big portraits of his wife and himself which he drew in chalk when they were both very old people, with a hand

of slashing and scientific energy, and with an amazing effect of color, were actually bought at a sale for less than a pound (twenty-four francs) the pair. Nearly thirty years later, even, matters had only so far mended as that the same priceless pair were acquired for the Louvre at one hundred and forty-six francs. The few amateurs and eccentrics who during the interval, and at the risk of being sneered at, liked to pick up pieces of the Louis Fifteenth master of still-life and domestic interior, have in their collections so formed bequeathed great fortunes to their children now living; for a good Chardin coming into the market to-day commands unlimited competition among the longest purses in Paris and in Europe. . . .

A master of still-life and domestic interior, and an admirable colorist and executant—that is Chardin's designation among the painters of the age of Louis XV., and it is one which implies a good deal both positively and negatively. The age of Louis XIV., the Great King, had its high art—or say its high-flying and academically learned art—of historical decoration and commemoration, and its pompous and strutting art of courtly portraiture; some more dissolute and undisciplined masters next embodied the spirit of the regency in forms which seemed like the looser undress of all that pomp; while Watteau invented his own brilliant and sprightly dream of witty pastime and glittering recreation, and Boucher followed as the profuse minister of pleasures less daintily inspired than these, the clever, cloying, monotonous fascinations of a perfumed Ovidian Olympus, and improper heaven of nakedness and rococo and tinted clouds and roses.

Observe that all these things alike were for the great ones of the earth; it is the monarchy itself, or that which revolves next about it, it is the wealthy and ruling, the indolent and predatory classes of the social hierarchy alone, who can either inspire or take much part in any of these forms of art. A popular art, beyond the confines of aristocratic fashion and luxury—popular either in its origin or its appeal—you shall not find. In the middle of the seventeenth century, indeed, France had had some examples of a real and interesting, almost a great, popularly inspired art, from the hands of the brothers Le Nain—French Rembrandts, as they in some sort were, who painted with a true and pathetic force scenes and figures from the life of the poorer trades, sons and daughters of toil. But the art of the Le Nain family was an isolated thing, and when Chardin took to painting simple scenes from the daily world of the *petite bourgeoisie* to which he himself belonged it was a new phenomenon for his contemporaries. So, too, had the other and preceding branch of his practice been also almost new to them—the painting of fruits and flowers and instruments and glasses and loaves and tablecloths and pots and pans and meat and game, as the subject of a picture by themselves—"still-life," as we say, or "dead nature," as the French language styles it. The animal painters Desportes and Oudry had both painted dead game—the former with a tedious woodenness and pretension, the latter with a forcible imitative manner enough; and the same Oudry again, with the same rather heavy way of deceptive imitation, had painted a few pictures of mere household objects. Then, of course, there were Dutch predecessors—Snyders and Fyt for game

and dead animals, Van Huysum for flowers, Metsu, Ter Borch, and plenty more for bourgeois interiors, to whom the choice of Chardin, and the exceptional position it gave him among the artists of his country, might be referred for precedent.

But Chardin was very unlike a Dutchman, and completely original in his manner of treating subjects that may have been partly analogous to theirs. He does not draw and paint a dead rabbit or bird sedulously, mechanically, microscopically, hair by hair, and feather by feather; he lays together a few rich and cunning strokes of the brush that seem to have hardly a meaning when the eye is close to them, but grow, as you retire a little, into a faultless and living representation of the natural object. That is the proper magic of the brush, that is the true epic manner in painting, which raises the commonest subject to a level with the highest, and gives a butcher's joint by Chardin a truer pictorial dignity than may belong to a demigod by Le Brun. It is the one magic and the one manner whereby mere "dead nature" becomes worth painting by itself. . . .

Chardin is a consummate master of pictorial harmony; and without any special arrangement of his objects, which may be merely taken straight from the parlor-table, or the larder or scullery, makes perfect pictures of them by seeing and rendering all their subtler, and what one can only call their nobler, relations of substance, shadow, reflection, and color. It may be only a tumbler on a board between two chestnuts and three walnuts, or it may be a scarlet cloth covered with the instruments of a band of music, or it may be a handsome set-out of grapes, plums, pears, pomegranates, Sèvres china, and bottles and flasks of wine; but there will always be the same dignified magic of representation; a perfect expression of form, figure, and texture; a lovely color where nature is lovely, jeweled lights, and caressing shadows, in which, as in nature, are mixed broken rays and reflections from all the colors that make up the group of things before us. Read Mr. Ruskin's account of the way in which Veronese paints a jewel; look at the way in which Chardin paints a peach or grape or plum, and (to compare small things with great) you will see that the Frenchman has found out for himself something like that large manner of the immortals. And, strangely for a Frenchman, he does it all without the faintest suspicion of swagger; he never says to himself or us how clever he is, but is as modest in his art as in his life. Never more than one picture on his easel at a time; everything done directly and laboriously from nature; each little inanimate study the ill-paid-for work of almost months; the essence of the magic an uncompromising industry and sincerity.

But for the majority and the untechnical, perpetual representations of dead objects, however beautifully done, will pall at last; and it is to his second class of pictures that the great contemporary popularity of Chardin was due. These represent the honest, modest, uncorrupted, straitened, but not unrefined household life of the petty French population—that lower *bourgeoisie* among whom the simpler virtues flourished, and in whom lay the strength and heart of the coming Revolution. The homely women go about their household work, or look after the children at their meals, or teach them their prayers or

graces or lessons; they wash or draw water from the pump, and cook and spin and scour, in neat petticoats and great white caps, with perhaps a quiet daintiness of blue or rose-color in some single bow or ribbon on cap or girdle or shoe. It is a world not of sensual ideals and high-dressed indolence, but of quiet matter-of-fact and decent toil for the elder folks, of innocent, reverent behaviour and simple, quiet play for the children. It is not at all brutal, ugly, or besotted, like that groveling world of the familiar Dutchmen, but has a pleasant, unluxurious grace and natural goodness which are its own. The difference is especially great in the children; the Dutchmen are not nice about children, having apparently not had them nice, but stolid little human puddings or dumplings at best; the Frenchman is charming. For perhaps the first time in art, there is real familiar insight and tenderness in following their blunt button features and shades of playful or puzzled behaviour, their docile mechanical piety or gentle sport, their pretty gravity and sweet self-importance, their little moods of devout awe or pouting impudence. . . .

Chardin also painted occasional portraits, but these are a difficult subject. In all his work where humanity comes in it is noticeable that his flesh-painting is perhaps less masterly than his painting of other things. And in one or two of the portraits attributed to him this circumstance is so marked that critics have started the supposition that the heads may have been the work of an indifferent portrait-painter, Aved, with whom Chardin lived in constant intimacy, the clothes and accessories only his own work. In one case only, a brilliant likeness of an old lady which is in private possession in Paris, competent amateurs declare with ecstasy that they find all the qualities which a first-class portrait in oils by this master ought to possess. And then there are the dashing performances, the pastel-portraits of himself and his wife in old age, wherein one does not know whether most to admire the hardihood of the veteran hand, risking all sorts of violences and paradoxes in color which his perfect instinct somehow brings into right relations of harmony, or the admirable force and sincerity of character in his own rugged, honest, heavy-featured, and shrewdly puckered old head, with its night-cap, green shade, and huge spectacles across the nose, and in the softer but still robust lineaments of the wise old lady who loved and survived him.

CHARLES NORMAND 'L'ART' 1901

THAT Chardin should have painted as he did at the period in which he made his appearance establishes his first claim to originality. Leaving out of consideration his pictures of still-life, which belong to all time and not to any special period, his domestic scenes appeared after the death of Watteau and in the full flush of the triumphant success of Boucher, the most graceful, the most seductive, and the most artificial of all painters of the French school. If, as Voltaire said, Madame de Pompadour did not yet reign at Versailles, it was evident from numerous indications in art and elsewhere that her accession to power was not far off. Chardin, however, was not among those who yoked themselves to the favorite's flowery chariot; in his own way he protested against the false movement in art destined for a score of years or more to turn

the heads of all Europe. He alone, in the full tide of fashion for the rococo, demanded the rights of nature and of truth. Not that he was a revolutionist; he had neither the desire nor the ability to be anything of that sort. Nor was he the head of any school; his wings had not the strength to lift him to such heights. He was simply an independent. He followed his own taste instead of conforming to that dictated by fashion, and he justly gauged his own powers —two merits by no means slight.

Chardin avoided the brilliant domain of fancy and prudently kept within the limits of that modest and bourgeois field which comprised the life he knew so well. But while fully appreciating the talents of his rivals, he was perhaps too much inclined to mistrust his own. The surroundings amidst which he always lived, and which in his paintings he repeatedly reproduced, seem to have somewhat restricted his ideas; and although his judgment was sound, he lacked fire and the power of expansion. Original in the conception of his subjects, he adopted a style almost unknown in France before his day; but it is only too evident that although he was a precursor, he was not a leader. His nature, somewhat timid and limited, shrinking from the effort of conception rather than from the labor of execution, was no doubt largely to blame in the matter. So gifted in certain respects, he nevertheless lacked not only the facile play of imagination, but the dash, the variety, the spirit, which characterize the other great painters of his day. If he continually repeated himself, it was not for the puerile pleasure of seeing himself in his work, but from the dread of an effort that was always painful to him.

These reservations made, I am at liberty to say in what respects Chardin seems to me truly great. In the first place, whether we consider his paintings of still-life or his domestic scenes, the composition is perfect. This quality does not at once strike the eye, simply because there is nothing about it which is not perfectly natural. "Harmony" is the word which constantly recurs in connection with Chardin in the praises bestowed upon him by his contemporaries, and we too find it most applicable. But harmony is so subtle, so almost impossible to grasp, that it is easier to feel than to put into words. Who has not seen a woman's costume so simple and yet so artistic that in thinking of it afterwards we remember none of the details, but recall only an exquisite impression of the whole? Chardin's pictures produce a similar effect. They do not forcibly strike the eye, they do not call forth at first sight any exclamations of admiration, but we come back to them, we are interested in them. First they please, finally they charm, and when we have become, so to speak, intimate with them, we discover a thousand beauties not dreamed of in the beginning, for we then find that these canvases, seemingly so simple and natural, have been composed with infinite art. However restrained they may be, the personages or the objects in them always fill the scene. Chardin may be reproached with a paucity of imagination, but it may be truly said that he understood admirably how to utilize the little he possessed. . . .

If sometimes, and very rarely is this the case, the arrangement in Chardin's works seems studied, it is only in his pictures of still-life, and in that kind of composition the fault is almost unavoidable; such a criticism can never be

made with regard to his domestic scenes. None of the people he paints are in the least concerned with the spectator who is supposed to be watching them. We see them, but they are never conscious of being seen—a great charm, and one which gives to Chardin's compositions an incomparable accent of truth.

His brush transcribes, with a fidelity more conscientious than that of many an acknowledged realist, the rooms, the furniture, the costumes of the day, showing us, above all, the exact appearance of the people—their carriage, gestures, attitudes—all those characteristics in which the men of a generation differ very little among themselves, but which mark them as belonging to a distinct period. Therefore it is that quite unintentionally on the painter's part, and simply because of his artistic honesty, Chardin's work possesses a considerable historic value.

What a pity that there are so few drawings by a master so patient, so assiduous, and all of whose inspirations were derived so directly from the world in which he lived! Chardin, we are told, never made use of a preliminary sketch, a drawing on paper; he worked directly upon his canvas, and worked only from nature, from the first stroke of the crayon to the final touch of the brush. His contemporaries complained of his slowness; his clients lost patience. He himself, too intent on painting truly to paint quickly, gained scarcely money enough for his support; but he did not for that reason cease to work in his own way, which was the true way.

Unity and harmony of composition, happy choice of subject, skilful arrangement of his personages, care that everything he painted should be true to nature—all these qualities of Chardin's pale beside that one which is of all others most distinctively characteristic of his genius. Like most of the masters of his day, like all that great school of the eighteenth century in France, so imperfectly understood, so maligned, and yet so original and so peculiarly French, he is above all else a colorist. On that point his contemporaries were not mistaken. "He is the painter," cried Diderot, "who understands the harmony of colors and reflections. O Chardin, it is not white, red, nor black that you grind to powder on your palette; it is the very substance of the objects themselves. It is the air and light that you take on the point of your brush and fix upon the canvas. . . . At times your painting is like a vapor breathed upon the canvas, and again it resembles a light foam which has been thrown upon it. Go close to it; everything is confused and disappears; draw off, and all is reproduced, recreated. It is said that Greuze, entering the Salon and seeing one of Chardin's pictures, looked at it and passed on, sighing deeply. This brief praise is more eloquent than mine."

Talent so unusual was bound to pique the curiosity of the public at a period when more thought was perhaps given than to-day to the technique of painting. Chardin's very reticence on the subject encouraged gossip. "His manner of painting," said one of his contemporaries, "is singular. He places his colors alongside of each other almost without mixing them, so that his work looks like mosaic or patchwork, or like that hand-made tapestry called '*point-carré*.'"

The only justification for such a rough and unpolished manner of painting

was a thorough knowledge of the effect that colors produce upon one another. Chardin had devoted much thought and study to the theory of painting, and on that subject was vastly in advance of his century. One of his biographers tells us that when he examined a picture totally lacking in harmony he knew just how, in a single word and without touching it, to point out the way to attain that accord which its painter had sought for in vain. In this respect his pictures, especially those of still-life, are full of instruction for a painter, teaching him that there are no independent colors in nature, that each one feels the influence of the neighboring object, that it is necessary to take into consideration not only reflections, but also the substance, be it dull or be it sparkling, which receives these reflections only to give them back again in its turn, and that, finally, a painting is like a symphony in which a thousand discords unite and mingle to produce a universal harmony. A half-hour passed before a picture by Chardin will teach the reader more than all that I could say on the subject. Then it will be seen how far the painter has penetrated into all the mysteries of light, how infinitely superior to any ordinary piece of still-life, calculated merely to deceive the eye, can be the exact imitation of nature, and how consummate the art with which Chardin's reflections are made to glance upon the shining surfaces which he never fails to introduce into his pictures. Silver goblets, polished and scintillating, bottles half full of wine, flowered china, big-bellied caldrons of gleaming copper, huntsmen's horns glittering with spangles of light—everything serves the painter's purpose of promoting a distribution of light which shall break all monotony of tone. Strange to say, patience and science resulted, in Chardin's case, in virtuosity!

It is possible to be always conscientious, but it is hardly possible in the course of a long career to be invariably equal to one's self. Most of Chardin's productions are those of a very good painter; some of them are those of a great master. The Flemings and the Dutch, with whom he is too often compared, have produced no better. Together with a genius and a vigor, which at times, indeed, he lacked, there is a broad, fat touch, a magic warmth of color, which justified Diderot's extravagant enthusiasm. Some of his compositions, especially his domestic scenes, are not so good; for besides the fact that they are sometimes badly drawn, and that the heads are for some reason or other slighted, there is occasionally a heaviness and a pervading gray tone, in keeping with the commonplace scenes they represent, which make us regret the splendid and inspired Chardin of his best period.

Finally, to end this game of criticism which gives now a slap and again a caress to one and the same individual, it may be said that Chardin's field is limited; that he lacks fertility of invention; that he has not always a great deal to say, but that what he has he says well. If, however, he is wanting in imagination, he has taste and a feeling for what is true. His natural gifts—discretion, moderation, sobriety, harmony—are distinctively French. He opened to painting a domain which had been unknown to her, at least in France, for nearly a hundred years, and if he did not explore it with all the boldness desirable, it was less his fault than the fault of his education and of his environ-

ment. He deals with unimportant subjects, but in his treatment of them he proves his superiority by his love of truth, by the harmony of his composition, and by the consummate science of his technique. Above all, he is at times a great colorist, and that alone is sufficient for his glory. — FROM THE FRENCH

LADY DILKE 'FRENCH PAINTERS OF THE XVIIITH CENTURY'

CHARDIN is not so much an eighteenth-century French artist as a French artist of pure race and type. Though he treated subjects of the humblest and most unpretentious class, he brought to their rendering, not only deep feeling and a penetration which divined the innermost truths of the simplest forms of life, but a perfection of workmanship by which everything he handled was clothed with beauty. His every touch is intelligent. With a severely restricted palette he contrives to produce the most varied harmonies of color, and, by a heroic reserve of force, endows his creations with an air of absolute freedom. . . .

Out of the most simple materials the great magician could evoke all the mystery and beauty of life. By some touch or suggestion he invariably contrived to fix a personal character on his groups of inanimate objects. They never seem to have been brought together haphazard, but always look as if some one had just left them, or was just coming back. So strong is the impression of the human presence that we pass from work in which it is simply felt to work in which it becomes visible without any lively sense of change — the environment has remained exactly the same. When at last the girl comes into the kitchen, the utensils of which are already familiar to us, nothing is disturbed; it seems as if she had been expected, as if we had been waiting for her appearance. . . .

Everything that Chardin touched, he touched with feeling as profound as it was personal. The common things, the every-day incidents of family life seen in the homes of the staid and prudent citizens of Paris, stirred his affections; the house-mother, kindly, foreseeing, careful, the little ones playing their very games with a certain gravity as if they had adopted something of the sober ways of their elders, these figures were sufficient for the exercise of Chardin's most perfect gifts. He treated with absolute simplicity the simple pleasures of simple life. All the actors in his innocent dramas live as they really lived; they appear before us in their actual frame. They wore their serviceable well-chosen garments; we know every item of their necessary furnishing — the chairs, the table, the brazier, their children's toys, their polished floors, and the very colors which they affected. An orderly, sober world, methodical and regular; so much so that we feel a mild surprise when the unwilling little scholar throws down his shuttlecock and battledore at the feet of his governess, and sulks impatiently whilst she brushes his hat and gives him unwelcome advice.

It has been reported that Descamps, looking at Chardin's work, cried out in despair, "Chardin's whites . . . I cannot get them!" But perhaps Chardin's browns are as wonderful as his whites. If we recall the scheme of any one of his works, of 'The Housekeeper,' for example, we shall remember the

living beauty of the flesh, the ivory whites, the warm rich blues, and immediately we shall see a certain quality of brown, a brown which has an extraordinary power of allying itself either to black or to the most delicate grays. Sometimes he actually breaks his browns with these beautiful grays, from the force and depth of which all the other hues seem to have borrowed a greater value. The grays which his contemporaries loved, and which served them to disperse the rainbow hues with which they loved to play, could not serve the turn of Chardin; tones of a stronger and more sober character became his palette, as he sat with closed doors, his whole powers concentrated in the office of penetrative sight.

To the last, Chardin remained faithful to the simple subjects and the unconventional standpoint which he had from the first adopted. The pleasures of happy imitation were enough for him; "to strike true" was the fulfilment of his highest ambition. To this temper of mind, seeking always with unerring instinct the beauty of perfect truth, the mere observation of the commonest actions, the most tranquil movements became a source of endless interest and pleasure. A baby learning to say "grace" before meat, a boy building his "card castle," are instinct, when touched by Chardin, with the full pathos of human life.

FREDERICK WEDMORE · 'THE MASTERS OF GENRE PAINTING'

THE art of Chardin has its own entirely distinctive character and charm. In each of its various methods of manifestation it is finely original and quietly fascinating. There is nowhere a greater painter of still-life. No one perhaps has given quite so well as he a reality without meanness—an arrangement without pretension or artifice. Nothing is put into his pictures thoughtlessly, and possessed as he was of a perception uniquely keen to note the varied individualities of matter and its artistic interest, he yet had little of mere pride in his ability to paint so well the object and the substance of his choice.

Here in one picture is exactly the material for the humblest meal and the things that are required to prepare it—that and no more. Here, in another, the fruits for the dessert of the rich, and with them the silver, the gold, the china of famous Dresden. The drawing of these things is right, though never elaborate; the roundness and relief astonishing for truth. The very quality of color and substance—color and substance seen through atmosphere and never harshly defined—abounds in his work. Sometimes it is very rich and glowing and very bold, and sometimes the work is tender and subtly refined. What infinite harmony in juxtapositions seemingly so natural, yet in truth so splendidly discovered! With what facility the supple hand sweeps over the keyboard of color, and wakes the fullness or sweetness of its sound!

Though these pictures in their own day could not make Chardin's fortune, they might have sufficed for his fame. They were followed, however, after many patient years, by work which won more promptly a title to celebrity. Interest centers still for most men in this second phase of his art. Chardin, for most men, is the painter of decent middle-class life, in its struggle with narrow means, and in its happiness, which is that of the family and of tranquil

and ordered work. Allied to certain of the Dutchmen, though hardly indeed to be confused with them, he resembles them in his faithful portrayal of the things that he saw, whether these be only the heaped-up contents of the fish-stall, and the fruits massed for dessert, and glasses from the cupboard, and a goblet, chased richly, or whether they be mother and children saying grace before the meal, or the housewife reckoning with contented gravity her morning's outlay in marketing, or the white-capped caretaker, gentle and young, bending forward with pleasant but impressive warning to the boy who is her charge.

But in the painting of what a man sees, there is, of course, choice always, and Chardin's choice was other than the Dutchmen's—other, at least, than that of Teniers, Brauwer, Ostade, Dusart; those to whom for certain qualities he has distantly been likened. His choice was guided by a sentiment sincere and healthy. So that between his work and theirs there comes to be a great wide difference—the gulf that separates vulgarity from simplicity, lowness from homeliness—besides that other difference which needs must be when their work is concerned with the round-faced phlegmatic type that lives its slow life among the gray canals of Holland, and his with the type of happy vivacity and quiet alertness and virginal or motherly grace which is that of the true middle class of France.

This difference there must always be, even if we take the work of Chardin and set it against that of another order of Dutchmen, the men whose sentiment is nearer it—Nicolaes Maes, and Vermeer of Delft, who, like Chardin, took representative moments of common occupations, and in recording them recorded a life. The finer spirit will still be Chardin's, and in looking over the suite of his engravings, or passing in review even the titles only of his pictures, we have proof that these figures which he painted were painted more with a single mind to the lives which the faithful portrayal of the habitual occupation was destined to reveal. No doubt the great Dutchmen thought of the life much, but in their unrivaled triumph of lights and shades, and tints and textures, they though of it—even the best of them—less than did Chardin.

And it is very noteworthy that Chardin, when he passed from the still-life which first engaged him to the painting of these domestic scenes, became, so to say, a second and quite another artist. He accepted frankly, and generally triumphantly, the new vocation; the marble of the mantelpiece, the red tiles of the floor, the shining metals of the parlor clock-case, were thenceforth chiefly accessories. With significant design, pleasant sobriety of tone, true observation, happy sentiment, he concentrated himself upon those scenes of the humble interior—that life contentedly restrained—whose quietness and diligence and homely grace and charm no one has more finely felt or finely rendered. In each order of work he was excellent, and in each he was alone. He was so possessed with the pure beauty of matter that in his art it takes new dignity. He saw so well and he believed so deeply in the virtues of his race and class that, more effectively and truly than any writer of his time, he grew to be their historian and their poet.

The Works of Chardin

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PLATES

'THE BLESSING' PLATE I

ONE of Chardin's most beautiful and popular pictures is 'The Blessing' ('Le Bénédicité'). It was exhibited in 1740, when he was at the height of his powers, and such a success did it attain that not only was the subject at once multiplied by engravings, but the artist was called on to repeat it again and again. Five similar versions, at least, are in existence—the original in the Louvre, which is here reproduced; another, an almost exact copy, in the same gallery; one in St. Petersburg, one in Stockholm, and a larger canvas with an additional figure in the Jahan-Marcille Collection, Paris.

In a plainly furnished room a table covered with a white cloth is prepared for the midday meal. Beside it stands a young mother in a brown dress, a blue apron, and white cap and kerchief, serving the smoking soup to her two little girls. The elder of the two, with her spotless pinafore and white cap tied with blue ribbon, is seated at the table, her plate already filled; the younger, in a white dress and pink cap, occupies a low chair at one side. Her tiny hands are clasped, and her whole mind is intent on the effort to remember the words of the blessing, which must be repeated before she shall receive her portion of the savory soup. Nothing can exceed the naïve beauty and tender sentiment of this little scene. "Charming in its composition, its simplicity, and its expression," writes M. Larroumet, "Chardin's picture 'The Blessing' is above all admirable because of the freedom of its touch, the perfect harmony of its coloring, and the delicacy of its light and shade."

The canvas measures nineteen and a half inches high by fifteen and a half inches wide.

'THE COOK' PLATE II

THIS picture, called in French 'La Ratisseuse,' is in the Liechtenstein Gallery, Vienna, and is spoken of by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt as among the most beautiful examples of the warm and glowing manner of painting characteristic of Chardin's early period. The scene is a kitchen in which the cook is seated in a low chair, pausing for a moment, knife in hand, in her occupation of cutting turnips. Beside her are a chopping-block, a copper kettle, and a saucepan, and at her feet an earthenware bowl full of glistening water into which the turnips are thrown when her knife has made them ready. Bright bits of color are given by the big yellow gourd in one corner and the vegetables lying near. The woman's skirt is reddish-brown, showing a glimpse of a scarlet petticoat beneath, her jacket is brown, and her cap and apron white, with touches of pale indigo. Chardin's consummate mastery of the art of painting inanimate nature is here excellently shown, and the colors are so combined that the effect of the whole is rich and delicious in harmony.

The canvas measures about eighteen inches high by fourteen inches wide.

'GRAPES AND POMEGRANATES' PLATE III

IN the painting of still-life Chardin is without an equal. Unfortunately, no black-and-white reproduction can give any idea of his color, so delicious in its tones that in a faithful portrayal of the most commonplace objects undreamed-of beauties are revealed.

"None of the older Dutchmen," writes Frederick Wedmore, "had conceived of common matter so nobly; and, sentiment apart, none had brought to its representation a touch quite so large, a palette quite so rich. His hues are blended and fused, and the influence of color upon the color that is near it he is found to have studied to perfection. Now the reflected light is cold and clear, and now it is vague and warm. To see these things as Chardin saw them is really to see them for the first time. He opens to us, in a measure entirely his own, the charms of the world of matter."

The picture reproduced in plate III. is, as M. Henry de Chennevières has said, "one of the most charming examples of the painter's still-life studies now in the Louvre. Grapes, pomegranates, two apples, a pear, wine-glasses, and a knife are arranged about a coffee-pot of flowered china. See how effective, how true to nature, are those grapes, just a tiny bit bruised—possibly a trifle over-ripe! and how perfectly the luscious purple center of that open pomegranate corresponds with the red wine in the glasses! The key of color, enhanced by the light reflected in the various objects, is clear, the whole effect of the picture bright and gay."

'THE MORNING TOILET' PLATE IV

'THE MORNING TOILET' ('La Toilette du Matin') was exhibited in Paris in 1741, and bought from the artist by the Comte de Tessin, then Swedish ambassador at Paris, who sent it to Stockholm, where it is now in the National Museum in that city.

No reproduction can convey any just idea of the exquisite beauty of this little picture, now unfortunately somewhat injured.

"In the dim-lit room," writes Lady Dilke, "in the uncertain morning light, the faint blues and pinks of the little girl's dress, massed with the white draperies of the dressing-table, tell out from the splendid amber yellow of the mother's petticoat, above which her gown, broad striped in red and white, is gracefully tucked up. No prettier lesson in coquettish dressing was ever given than the one conveyed by these two figures. Topknots peep out scarlet from beneath the hood of the mother's black tippet, delicately blue above the fair child's forehead; the little muff in her baby hand is blue velvet and white fur, whilst by the prayer-book on the red stool, over which falls the red drapery which enframes the mirror on the toilet-table, lies another muff of green velvet and sable, cunningly chosen to give the last touch of elegance to her mother's appearance. The accessories—the toilet-service, with its silver candlestick, the clock, the piece of furniture on which it stands—all show the ease of graceful if simple life, and one guesses that costumes so finished can scarcely

have been donned only to go to church—mass will certainly be followed by less serious engagements."

The picture measures nineteen and a half inches high by fifteen and a half inches wide.

'THE HOUSEKEEPER' PLATE V

THIS picture in the Louvre, called in French 'La Pourvoyeuse,' was first exhibited at the Salon of 1739, when one of the critics of the day, writing of the exhibition, said, "Monsieur Chardin is always himself, and always inimitable in his portrayal of small and amusing subjects. Everything that he paints is delightful, but the most popular of his pictures this year is that of a young woman just returned from market."

Standing before us in her striped petticoat, pale bluish-lavender apron, and white cap and bodice, this young woman holds in one hand a leg of mutton tied up in a napkin, while the other rests upon two large loaves of bread which she has deposited on a sideboard. In the background, through an open doorway, a maid-servant, in a yellow dress and white cap and apron, is seen conversing with some one whose head alone is visible. The creamy white in the housekeeper's costume, the faded tones of her apron, the golden-brown crusts of the loaves of bread, whitened with flour, the dark red earthenwar jar beside them, the two bottles on the floor, just touched with light, the copper "fountain" in the background silhouetted against a pale wall, and beyond, the little figure in yellow and white—all combine to produce an effect such as none but Chardin could produce. "So beautifully harmonious is the coloring," writes the Comte de Chennevières, "so broad and free the way in which it is painted, so luminous the atmosphere, that words fail to give any adequate idea of its charm."

The picture measures about eighteen inches high by fourteen and a half inches wide.

'THE YOUNG DRAFTSMAN' PLATE VI

PAINTED in 1737 and exhibited at the Salon in the following year, this picture was purchased for the crown prince of Prussia (afterwards Frederick the Great). It is now the property of the Emperor of Germany, and is in the New Palace at Potsdam.

"In spite of the state of the background," writes Lady Dilke, "which has been both repainted and cleaned, we receive at once a unique impression of breathing life. This boy in the cocked hat and white coat is evidently a portrait. He is tired, he is bored, he is putting off work; the red strings of his blue portfolio hang untied over the edge of the table on which he rests his arms; otherwise there is no touch of color, the figure exists in pure light, and affords a striking example of that extraordinary charm, proper to Chardin, which does not lie in the grip which he gets of his subjects, and the precision with which he handles them—in these respects others are greater than he—but in his instinct for the quality of their environment, for that something which gives personality to the ambient air."

'PORTRAIT OF MADAME CHARDIN' PLATE VII

THIS pastel-portrait in the Louvre, of the artist's second wife, Françoise Marguerite Pouget, is a work of Chardin's old age, executed when he was seventy-five, but with so vigorous and firm a hand and such unerring skill that by many it is regarded as his masterpiece.

Madame Chardin was sixty-seven when she sat to her husband for this portrait. She wears a brown dress, a black silk shoulder-cape, white muslin fichu, and white cap with band and bow of blue ribbon. The colors are beautifully harmonious; the drawing and modeling are both delicate and strong.

The Goncourts call attention to the marvelous way in which Chardin has here expressed the indications of approaching old age. The forehead, "pale with the pallor of ivory," the serene and serious expression, the slight dimness of the eyes, the thin, fleshless look of the nose, the mouth a little sunken, the complexion "like fruit just touched with winter's frost"—nothing is wanting that could enhance the semblance of reality in this beautiful example of the master's latest years.

'THE GOVERNESS' PLATE VIII

'THE GOVERNESS' ('La Gouvernante'), sometimes called 'Mother and Son,' offers a charming example of Chardin's art in the painting of children. When first exhibited in Paris, at the Salon of 1739, we are told that it at once attained popularity. The subject, as in all Chardin's works, is of the utmost simplicity. A little boy with books under his arm, dressed in accordance with the quaint fashion of the day, in a violet-colored frock-coat, and with his hair neatly tied with a bow of ribbon, is standing near his governess, who, to judge from the expression of discontent on the face of the child, addresses reproving words to her little charge as she pauses in the act of brushing his three-cornered hat. The background of the picture is of a warm yellowish tone, against which are relieved the greenish dress and the white cap and apron of the woman, and the red of the chair in which she is seated.

The canvas measures about eighteen inches high by fourteen inches wide. It is in the Liechtenstein Gallery, Vienna.

'A GIRL DRAWING WATER' PLATE IX

THE original version of this picture, called in French 'Une fille tirant de l'eau à une fontaine,' or simply 'La Fontaine,' is dated 1733, and is now in the National Museum, Stockholm, unfortunately in an almost ruined condition. Of the half-dozen or more repetitions of the subject, the one here reproduced is in the Jahan-Marcille Collection in Paris.

The picture admirably exemplifies Chardin's special qualities. The painting of the creamy whites of the cap and jacket of the girl bending over to turn the spigot of the copper "fountain," whose shining surface reflects the light and is contrasted with the girl's blue apron and the black jug she holds, the faithful portrayal of each homely accessory of the simple scene—the

piece of meat hanging from the ceiling, the barrel with a copper kettle and a white cloth upon it, the logs of wood, the cooking utensils on the tiled floor, the light room beyond, in which we see a woman sweeping, and a little child —all show it to be, as Paul Mantz has said, "the work of a painter whose touch is firm and unfaltering, and whose color is as delicate as it is vigorous."

'A LADY SEALING A LETTER' PLATE X

THIS picture, owned by the Emperor of Germany and now in the New Palace, Potsdam, belongs to Chardin's early period. It bears the date 1733, and was first exhibited at the Place Dauphine, Paris, in the following year, and again at the Salon of 1738. Of much larger dimensions than most of Chardin's works, it is, as Lady Dilke has said, "distinguished by suggestions of opulence which contrast with the habitual simplicity of his favorite scenes." "This last," she writes, "is, however, a point not to be exaggerated, for other sitters to Chardin (as the mother and child in 'The Morning Toilet') wear costumes as rich as the sacque of black-and-white striped brocade which clothes the lady who, with her letter in one hand, her sealing-wax in the other, leans forward in her chair, indifferent to the caress of the greyhound at her side, whilst her eyes are fixed on the candle inclined towards her across the table by a footman, whose golden-brown coat, with its collar of dark fur, tells above the deep red of the table-cover and its Turkish border. The work has suffered here and there from retouching, but the effect of the whole is undisturbed, and portions, such as the sculpturesque greyhound, are of great beauty. The simple truthfulness of gesture, the beautiful drawing and modeling of the lady's hands and arms, the masterly rendering of the half seen profile, lovely neck, and soft hair crowned by a topknot of lace, are all indications of the hand of Chardin at his strongest,—his color and his brush are full."

A LIST OF THE PRINCIPAL WORKS OF CHARDIN IN PUBLIC LOCATIONS

AUSTRIA. VIENNA, LIECHTENSTEIN GALLERY: The Cook (Plate II), The Governess (Plate VIII); The Housekeeper; A Cook peeling a Lemon — ENGLAND. DULWICH COLLEGE GALLERY: Girls at Work — LONDON, NATIONAL GALLERY: Study of Still-life; A Girl drawing Water — FRANCE. AMIENS MUSEUM: Studies of Still-life — ANGERS MUSEUM: Three Studies of Still-life — CHERBOURG MUSEUM: Still-life — PARIS, LOUVRE: The Blessing (Plate I); The Cat in the Larder, or 'La Raie'; Fruit on a Stone Table; The Busy Mother; Dead Rabbit and Hunting Outfit; A Meager Repast; An Abundant Repast; The Monkey Antiquary; Attributes of the Arts; Attributes of Music; The Housekeeper (Plate V); The Blessing; Pipes and Drinking-glasses; A Basket of Peaches; The Card Castle; The Monkey Painter; Melons, Pears, and Peaches; Grapes and Pomegranates (Plate III); The Jar of Olives; A Girl drawing Water; A Dessert; Peaches, Nuts, Grapes, and a Wine-glass; Different Utensils; Pears and a Glass of Wine; The Silver Goblet; The Kitchen Table; The Basket of Grapes; Cooking Utensils and Eggs; Portrait of Chardin (pastel); Portrait of Chardin (pastel) (Page 22); Portrait of Madame Chardin (pastel) (Plate VII) — ROUEN MUSEUM: Still-life — GERMANY. CARLSRUHE GALLERY: Five Studies of Still-life — MUNICH GALLERY: The Cook — POTSDAM, NEW PALACE, COLLECTION OF THE EMPEROR OF GERMANY: A Lady sealing a Letter (Plate X); The Young Draftsman (Plate VI); The Cook — IRELAND. DUBLIN, NATIONAL GALLERY:

The Card Castle — RUSSIA. ST. PETERSBURG, HERMITAGE GALLERY: The Blessing; The Washerwoman; Boy playing with Cards — SWEDEN. STOCKHOLM, NATIONAL MUSEUM: The Washerwoman; A Girl Drawing Water; The Young Draftsman: The Morning Toilet (Plate IV); The Blessing; The Busy Mother; Dead Rabbit and Copper Caldron; A Young Woman with Worsted Work; A Lady seated holding a Book — UNITED STATES. BOSTON, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS: Two Studies of Still-life — NEW YORK. GALLERY OF ART OF THE NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY: Two Studies of Still-life.

Chardin Bibliography

A LIST OF THE PRINCIPAL BOOKS AND MAGAZINE ARTICLES DEALING WITH CHARDIN

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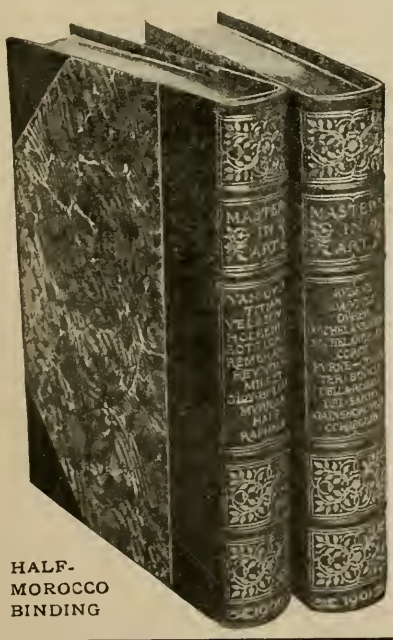

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